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AUTHOR Langmyer, David B.; Huntington, Gail S.
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ABSTRACT

This information package offers guidelines on conducting program evaluations to improve services. Though the examples relate specifically to respite care services for families of individuals with disabilities, the information is more generally applicable. In the first of four factsheets, titled "Local Program Evaluation," the form of evaluation focuses on continuous quality improvement, and programs are seen as evolving and improving as they get information about their successes and accomplishments. Steps that need to be accomplished include: determine the scope of the evaluation, select appropriate evaluation methods, collect and analyze information, and report and utilize findings. The second factsheet, "Developing Evaluation Questions," divides evaluation questions into process questions and outcome questions. Process evaluation questions can be divided into structural questions and activity questions. Outcome questions require knowledge of how program activities relate to changes in consumer, family, and community behavior, attitudes, knowledge, skills, or intentions. A theory of action is used to provide links between current activity and future intended goals. The third factsheet, "Evaluation Measures," examines what is to be measured, how it will be measured, and who will complete the measure. The final factsheet on developing evaluation reports lists ways of communicating evaluation results and examines the components of a good evaluation report, including verbal and numerical descriptions of data. (JDD)

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Phone: 1-800-473-1727 or (919) 490-5577; FAX: (919) 490-4905
Human Services InterNet/SpecialNet Username: NC.CHOUTREACH

[Developing Effective Program Evaluations: Fact Pack]

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Local Program Evaluation

"We should be careful to get out of an experience only the wisdom that is in it...the cat that sits down on a hot stove lid will never sit on a hot stove lid again—and that is well; but also she will never sit down on a cold one any more."

Mark Twain

Background

While there may be many ways of approaching evaluation, the focus of this factsheet will be on evaluation activities conducted to improve the service system rather than activities with a research focus. With this in mind, the characteristics of program evaluation are:

- it involves the gathering of information about a program's intentions, its activities, and the impact of these activities;
- it is a management or administrative activity;
- it is planned, purposeful and systematic; and,
- it is meant to improve services.

Program evaluation is an activity which summarizes the accomplishments of a program. It can be performed as a separate activity from the ongoing management of the program, or, evaluation can be a management tool which routinely gives information back to the program for the purpose of changing it, improving it, and renewing it. The form of evaluation charted below is consistent with a continuous quality improvement in which programs are seen as evolving and improving as they get information about their successes and accomplishments.

The following steps need to be accomplished in order to plan, implement and use program evaluation:

Determine the Scope of the Evaluation

1. ***Identify the purpose of the evaluation.***

- What issues or key questions about the program are to be addressed by the evaluation?
- Who are the primary users of the evaluation and what are their key concerns?
- Who needs to be involved in discussions about the evaluation: program managers, clients, direct service staff, funders, etc.
- Are some evaluation findings needed to satisfy requirements of an outside agency? Are specific requirements mandated, e.g., use of particular instruments, reports with specific content or format?

2. ***Assure that there is a good understanding of the program.***

- Are there written documents which describe the program, its goals and objectives, and its operations?
- What are the existing sources of information about the program's activities, staff, consumers, and outcomes?
- What is the program's philosophy? Are there program implementation directives or guides?
- What is the scope of program activities? How many staff, consumers, and sites exist?
- Who is affected by the program? (Who are the consumers?) How are they supposed to be affected? Describe how the program's activities are expected to result in changes to the consumers, their families, and the community at large.

3. ***Begin to develop the focus of the evaluation***

- The focus of the evaluation may be to clarify

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program goals; successes or problems with program implementation; consumer satisfaction; the financial feasibility of the services; whether or not the program meets the needs of the community; or, progress on intended outcomes.

Select Appropriate Evaluation Methods

1. ***Make sure that you are asking the right questions, which focus on key aspects of the program.***

- Re-examine the reasons for doing the evaluation. Is it for an external agency (are there any requirements)? If for internal use, what are the concerns or needs which led to the request for an evaluation?
- Make the questions specific enough to focus the assessments, observations, and comparisons to be made. Scrutinize each question to think how to ask it more specifically. For each outcome, try to imagine how you would *know* when you have achieved it.

2. ***Determine how to collect the information you want.***

- For each question, develop a set of tangible behaviors or events which represent the activity or event under focus. They can be verbal responses to a posed question, or responses on a paper and pencil instrument.
- Check to see if information or data are already available for the measures being developed. Staff and consumer activity may have already been collected. Information about the consumers may have been collected during the initial contact.
- If the information is not readily available, select measures or instruments you may want to use.

3. ***Determine from whom data will be collected.***

- Information about consumers, staff, and activities has probably been collected already (all intake forms, all staff activities, etc.). If not, then it must be determined *when* information will be collected; from *which sites*; and *which people or groups* will be the focus of the data collection.

4. ***Estimate the cost of the evaluation (revise plans based on the estimate).***

Collect and Analyze Information

1. ***Construct or purchase instruments if the data or information does not exist in program records.*** (See Factsheet number 14 on Evaluation Measures for more detailed information.)

2. ***Set deadlines for data collection.***

- For example, start with the deadline for an interim report, or the date on which an important meeting is to take place when the data will be needed. Work back from that date; set deadlines and expectations. Be realistic: activities often take longer to accomplish than expected.
- Determine who will be responsible for each task.
- Determine whether any training will be necessary and schedule it.
- Determine if any additional staffing will be needed for such tasks as data collection, coding, editing and analysis.

3. ***Set expectations for interpreting the data.***

- *Before* starting to collect data, try to talk with the primary users of the evaluation and have them decide how the results will be interpreted. The way in which data are collected, the sources of the data, and the analysis of the data may be affected by the answers to these questions.
- To what extent can the evaluation plan be altered after it has begun? Can it be altered by time, by data collected, or by type of analysis?

4. ***Check to see that the data collection is implemented as planned.***

5. ***Analyze data with an eye toward program improvement.***

If the evaluation has focused on specific program units, it is important to consider the following points:

- The component's implementation, compared to its intentions.
- Consumer's attitudes about the program component in question.
- Consumer's achievement/performance as a result of the program.

Report and Utilize Findings

1. ***Decide how to communicate results.***

- Consider the full range of strategies available and use more than one if appropriate. For example: informal communications (in the hall, over coffee, before and after meetings); less formal meetings (small groups, no minutes); formal meetings; memos; written reports; newsletters; electronic communication; visual presentations (slide show, video show); public meetings; and local media.

2. ***Meet with program managers or staff to discuss and follow up on findings.***

- This step may take place a number of times. Each time there may need to be a revision in the presentation of the results.
- The findings, regardless of how they are presented, should discuss some or all of the follow-

ing: program operations; consumer satisfaction; whether the program is being implemented as planned; the effect of the program on the primary consumers; the strengths and weaknesses of the program; outside factors that are influencing the program; key problems that have occurred or that might be anticipated; adequacy of progress toward program outcomes; and, the differential effectiveness of the program under particular conditions or with particular individuals.

- Include specific program recommendations with the idea that the original purpose of the evaluation was to change and improve the program.

Summary

There are many kinds of program evaluation activities. What characterizes all of them is that they seek to enable us to "know" about programs rather than to guess about them. Therefore, evaluation activities are planned, purposeful, and systematic in the way they ask and answer questions about the program.

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About the Authors: David B. Langmyer, Ph.D., *is an Evaluation Consultant to ARCH. He was Chief of Evaluation and Research in the NC Division of MH/DD/SA Services for 13 years.* Gail S. Huntington, Ph.D., *is Director of Evaluation and Research for ARCH. She is a Research Investigator at the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Center at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.*

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Developing Evaluation Questions

The evaluation focus will determine the questions asked. An evaluation can occur at different points in the program cycle. A program engages in very concrete sets of services, which may, or may not, lead to outcomes for the consumer, family of the consumer, or the community at large. In addition, the outcomes may occur immediately during or after the program is offered, or some time later. All of this can be summarized in the following chart.

Developing Process Questions

Process evaluation helps answer questions about whether or not the ongoing program is functioning as it was intended. It is also the most helpful tool for program managers in operating the program on a day to day basis. Process evaluation addresses the ongoing program structure and activities. Questions such as those on the following list are important for process evaluation.

- Is the appropriate structure in place to maintain the program?
- Is the appropriate staff in place to offer the intended program?
- Are the people receiving the service those who were identified as most in need?
- Are the services which are being provided those which were intended to be provided?
- Are consumers receiving the amount of service they need?

Process evaluation can be divided into *structural* questions and *activity* questions. Structural questions relate to resources and organization, whereas activity questions relate to staff and consumer behaviors.

Structural Questions

Structural questions are similar to standards for licensing or accreditation. It is generally believed that some organization and resources are needed to properly run a program. Some structural questions are:

- Is there a written statement of the philosophy and approach to services, a mission statement?
- Is there an administrative structure which would support a program (organizational chart, board of directors, personnel policy, hiring practices which are consistent with philosophy and program intent, etc.)?
- Does the physical setting of the program conform to the program's intent?
- Are there proper procedures for consumer involvement in program planning and evaluation; recruitment and enrollment; and routine and emergency program operations?
- Are there mechanisms for accountability?

Activity Questions

Activity questions are aimed at actual staff and consumer behavior. Staff activity relates to:

- What kinds of activities did staff engage in?
- How much did each staff member do?
- To which consumers did the staff give service?
- Where did the staff provide the service?

Staff activity should imply consumer activity, but it may not. Another set of questions, similar to staff questions, can be asked about consumers:

- What kinds and how many consumers were served?
- What kinds of services were offered and in what intensity?
- At what times and in what settings were the services received?

Being able to *document* that there is an active program is an important accountability activity. It is also important for internal program management to know who is engaged in what activity.

Developing Outcome Questions

In order to develop short or long term outcome questions, it is important to know clearly how the program activities relate to changes in consumer, family, and community behavior, attitudes, knowledge, skills or intentions. The "model" which relates the mundane activities of the program to the short and long term outcomes and impacts in the consumers, families and community is called a *theory of action*.

The *theory of action* provides links between current activity and future intended goals. To develop a theory of action just keep asking, **"Why do we do this?"**

What is expected to be the *immediate result* of a program action? By repeating this question for each step of the *theory of action*, you develop a linkage between program activities and future changes in consumer, family or community behavior, attitudes, knowledge, skills or intentions. The outcome of one activity is usually the next "activity" so that a chain develops linking the program's services with longer term outcomes *(see chart below)*.

Visit the operators of a women's shelter
⇩
Operators develop knowledge of the programs offered
⇩
Referrals increase
⇩
Provide temporary child care to families in need
⇩
Families can experience relief from child care burden
⇩
Families experience and report reduction in stress
⇩
Families experience less anger and frustration toward child
⇩
Less child abuse experienced and reported*

With this set of linkages, choices can be made about what is an appropriate outcome, when it is likely to occur, and what should be the focus of an evaluation effort.

Summary

Evaluation questions should follow from a thorough understanding of the program's operations, intentions, and consumers. When developing a *theory of action*, choices can be made about what is an appropriate outcome, when it is likely to occur, and what should be the focus of an evaluation effort.

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About the Authors: David B. Langmyer, Ph.D., *is an Evaluation Consultant to ARCH. He was Chief of Evaluation and Research in the NC Division of MH/DD/SA Services for 13 years.* Gail S. Huntington, Ph.D., *is Director of Evaluation and Research for ARCH. She is a Research Investigator at the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Center at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill*

*Note on Outcome Chart *(left)*: measuring this as an outcome requires a sophisticated evaluation design.

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Evaluation Measures

Introduction

In selecting or developing measures for evaluation questions or objectives, three questions always have to be answered:

- What is to be measured?
- How will it be measured?
- Who will complete the measure?

What is to be measured?

Evaluation measures may focus on the following: *behaviors, consumer satisfaction, knowledge, skills, attitudes, beliefs,* or *events*.

In focusing on the process evaluation of program activities and short term outcomes, what is measured primarily includes staff and program events as well as consumer changes in knowledge, attitudes and beliefs. The real payoff for most programs is changes in behavior, which might take place at a later time and in a different setting.

How will it be measured?

A complete list of measurement strategies is impossible to formulate because any activity which yields information can be a measurement method. The number of such activities is limited only by the imagination and resourcefulness of the person planning the evaluation. Common measurement strategies can be summarized into the following five categories:

Program Records: existing records, documents, intake and discharge forms. Program records are most useful for evaluations of program activities. Commonly, staff activities and other program activities are routinely captured. In addition, intake information is often routinely recorded. Using this information can be inexpensive and non-intrusive since it already exists. If the information is not suitable, it may be possible to make small changes in what is recorded, how often it is recorded, or some other aspect of the program record to make the information useful for evaluation purposes.

Public Domain Records: government statistics and documents. Public domain records can be helpful in knowing how a program is affecting the community at large. A crisis nursery program may be intended to reduce the incidence of child abuse, and the public record of the number of reported incidents might be used as an outcome indicator. In addition, individuals in the program can be matched with public records. This might include driving records, arrest and conviction records, or school records.

Behavioral Observations: observations, simulations, demonstrations, and physical evidence. Behavioral observations can be helpful if the program intends to teach particular skills or behaviors. Observing parents interacting with their child provides an opportunity for programs to demonstrate alternative and non-abusive methods of discipline. Observing parents at play with their child could demonstrate how parents are integrating physical therapy activities along with the play activities.

Interviews: structured interviews, and clinical examinations. Interviews are a rich source of information. Aside from the informant responding to formal questions, it also gives participants a chance to talk about the program and the individual's participation in the program.

Paper and Pencil Instruments: questionnaires, ratings, diaries, surveys. Paper and pencil tests will be discussed further in the section on "choosing a measure."

Who will complete the measure?

The source of the information is not always a matter of choice; but often the "same" information can be gathered from a number of sources, e.g., belief about

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the stress level of a family can come from the mother, the father, other family members, program staff, or professional consultants. In general, the choices for source of information are: *program records; program recipient (client); family members, friends, co-workers; program staff;* or *another observer or professional.*

Confidentiality

Whatever the source of information, attention must be paid to confidentiality. There are two factors in confidentiality: (a) *doing no harm,* (b) *informed consent.*

Doing No Harm

The way in which you collect and report information must not do harm to consumers, staff, or others associated with the program. Obviously, personal identifying information must not be included on data collection forms or reports. In addition, the manner in which information is gathered should not, in and of itself, pose a physical, psychological, or social threat to an individual. In some cases, just revealing that an individual is receiving services is damaging.

Informed Consent

Informed consent is a strong protection for the participant in an evaluation. Under this principle, an individual participates in the evaluation only after being fully told what would be expected of them in participating, and any conceivable risks of participating. This would include the methods that will be employed to preserve the anonymity of the individual. Depending on the source of the information, and the purposes for which the information is to be used, federal guidelines do not always require informed consent, but it is always the surest way of protecting the program and the consumers who participate in an evaluation.

Choosing a Measure

Measuring knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, skills and even observing behaviors is a deceptively simple task. It is easy to do incorrectly. Whether dealt with openly or not, any measure is subject to issues of (a) *reliability* and (b) *validity.*

Reliability

Reliability is the consistency of the measure. Would you get the same response if taken again under similar conditions? How different would the measure be under alternative conditions, such as a different time or setting?

Validity

Validity is the extent to which an instrument measures what it is intended to measure. Often the most common form of validity is "nominal validity," that is, the name of the test is the same as the indicator of interest; but this is not really adequate.

Fortunately, most measures used in program evaluation are obvious. They involve program, staff and participant event information which is easily observed and recorded. Any differences between what is recorded as happening and what actually happened are usually trivial. For example, the sign-in sheet used to count the number of participants may be "off" by one or two, but that may not be a big enough error to warrant abandoning the use of the sign-in sheet.

When it is necessary to assess something other than program events or records, the choice is between using or adapting an existing measure, or constructing a new one. It is worth a fair amount of searching to locate measures that have already proven themselves. Instruments with a history of use usually have information about reliability, validity, and which populations are appropriate for their use.

Finding previously used measures is not always easy. A literature search is a good place to start. Contact with other crisis nursery or respite care providers can help, as can contact with a national clearinghouse or resource center. Wherever you find possible measures, the following list of information may be helpful in deciding if a measure can be useful.

General Reference Information

- What is the name of the measure?
- Who is the author?
- Who is the publisher?
- What is the date of publication?
- What is the cost?
- How long does it take to administer?

Validity Information

- With what sort of groups has the measure been employed?
- With what other measures has this measure been correlated?
- With what later outcomes has this measure been correlated?
- How accurate a prediction does the measure give of significant outside criteria?
- How closely do the measures' reported objectives correspond to your objectives?
- What have reviewers and critics said about the measure?

Reliability Information

- Do the authors indicate the size and nature of groups for which data is reported?
- Do they indicate the type of reliability coefficient computed?
- Do they give the mean and standard deviation for the groups?
- Do they report reliability for each type of group that may be included in the evaluation?

Practical Considerations

- Are the instructions and procedures suited to your population?
- Are the time requirements reasonable for your purposes?
- Is the form to be used legible, attractive and convenient?
- How much time is required in scoring the measure?
- Do you or your staff have the skills to administer and score the instrument. If not, are there funds available to hire someone?
- Were the norms for the measure developed on a similar population?
- How much does the measure cost when employed in your situation?

Summary

Selecting the evaluation measures is one of the more critical activities when developing an evaluation program. Whatever a program's intentions are in providing a service, or in changing the lives of consumers, what is chosen to be measured will be the way the program is judged.

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About the Authors: David B. Langmyer, Ph.D., *is an Evaluation Consultant to ARCH. He was Chief of Evaluation and Research in the NC Division of MH/DD/SA Services for 13 years.* Gail S. Huntington, Ph.D., *is Director of Evaluation and Research for ARCH. She is a Research Investigator at the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Center at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill*

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Data Analysis and Presentation

Developing the Evaluation Report

Introduction

The evaluation "report" is one of the most important parts of the evaluation. It is the official record of the evaluation. For many people it is the *only* part of the evaluation that is seen. A good evaluation "report" answers some or all of the evaluation questions. An evaluation "report" does not have to be a written report! However, there should be a written document available to the agency.

There are many ways of communicating results of an evaluation including:

- *informal communications* (in the hall, over coffee, before and after meetings);
- *less formal meetings* (small groups, no minutes);
- *formal meetings;*
- *memos;*
- *written reports;*
- *newsletters;*
- *electronic communication;*
- *visual presentations* (slide show, video show);
- *public meetings;* and
- *local media presentations.*

A good evaluation report:

- describes the program and the steps in the evaluation;
- explains the procedures used;
- presents the findings;
- draws conclusions about those findings;
- and is prepared with the audience in mind.

More than one report is frequently useful. A report is often used for different purposes, and with different audiences. Many people do not need a long report, or even a written report. A short summary report, or a verbal report, will satisfy the needs of such an audience. On the other hand, some people need the detailed information which can only be provided by a long report. There is also reason to have a more detailed report for archival purposes.

Presenting the Data

In general, most evaluations conducted by local programs would lend themselves to *descriptive* analysis of data. Descriptive analysis is a way of summarizing and aggregating results from groups. If an evaluation has been conducted which employs a control group, or measures changes in program participants over time, then it might be appropriate to employ *inferential* analysis in which a decision is made about whether the particular results of the study are "real". More emphasis will be placed on descriptive analysis in this fact sheet.

Verbal Description of Data

Many reports rely on narrative information to present most, if not all, of the necessary information. Narrative information may be presented in three ways: standard writing style; tables; and/or, figures, diagrams, maps, and charts.

Standard writing style, that is, the use of sentences and paragraphs, is often the best way to present information, especially to audiences that are not accustomed to working with charts, graphs, tables, numbers, etc. It is the only way to present information such as examples and explanations. If standard writing style is used to summarize the results of open ended questions ("What do you like *most* about the program?"), it is often useful to give some indication of how often a particular response was given.

Tables represent narrative or numerical information in tabular fashion. A table arranges information in rows or columns, so that data elements may be referred to easily. They provide a clear and succinct way to present data, and are often more simple and understandable than standard writing style. They also facilitate the interpretation of data.

Program Site	Hours of Operation	Type of Service
Wedgewood Day Care	7:30-6:00 M-F	Center Based Day
Crystal Home	24 Hours	Center Based Overnight

Figure 1: Program Site Table

Figures, diagrams, maps and charts present verbal information visually. They often describe information more clearly than several paragraphs of description. Common forms of figures are: flow charts; organization charts; GANT charts; and/or maps.

> ***Flow charts*** are particularly useful for presenting relationships and/or describing the sequence of events and the location and result of decisions.
>
> ***Organization charts*** are useful for presenting the chain of responsibility in a program.
>
> ***GANT charts*** list a set of tasks. They indicate the time each task is to be performed and by whom.
>
> ***Maps*** visually describe certain geographical areas. They are useful in describing different conditions for individual geographical areas.

Numerical Description of Data

Data are not only described in narrative, they are often described numerically. Three of the most basic types of summarization are:

- frequency distribution;
- percent; and
- average.

Each of these types of summarization may be presented as part of the text or arranged in tables or figures (graphs). Inclusion as part of text (*"The average age for children served was 18 months"*) is an obvious way to report data.

Frequency distribution determines the number of units (e.g., people) which fall into each of a series of specified categories. In order to do a frequency distribution one must have categories. Reporting on age, for example, requires that you group the data first before constructing a frequency distribution (e.g., "birth to 2 years," or "3 to 5 years"). The evaluation might look to see how many parents were members of particular racial or ethnic categories, how many were known to protective services, or how many were referred from a range of referral sources.

Frequency distributions are not limited to descriptions of consumer characteristics. Program activity can also be presented categorically. The frequency distributions can be presented as tables or graphs (usually bar graphs). See figures 2 and 3 for examples.

	Crisis Nursery	Respite Care
Two Parent	97	213
Single Parent	182	78
Foster Parent	2	35
Relative	7	7
Other	22	3

Figure 2: Family Type Table

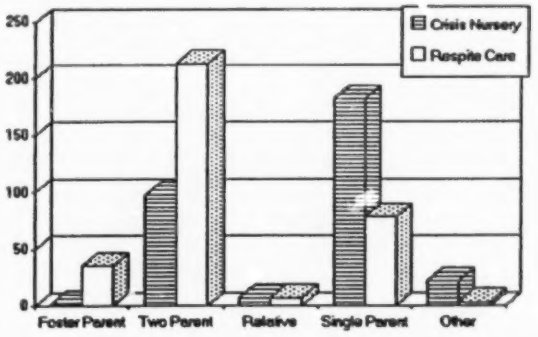

Figure 3: Family Type Bar Chart

Percent is another useful way of describing data. A frequency count can be converted to percent by dividing the number of units for a particular category by the total number of units and multiplying by 100. Percents are often more easily understood than the corresponding frequency counts. Percents can be represented in the same manner as frequency counts. In addition, a pie chart is useful in breaking the total group of people into the percentage of the total represented by each category. See Figure 4 for an example.

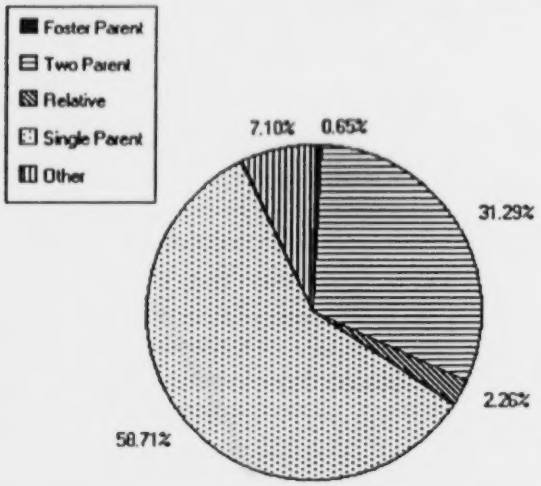

Figure 4: Crisis Nursery Percents

An average is a way of summarizing all of the information into one number. It can be used with data which is *non-categorical* numerical data. You *cannot* have a numerical average for gender or race, for example. Using a numerical average is very powerful, but it can also be misleading. A few data points which are very different from the others could substantially change the numerical average. For example, if the ages of children you serve are generally between 1 and 3 years, but you get one child who is 18, the average may be thrown off. Averages can be represented in tables or graphs.

Average Length of Respite Care	
Name of Child	Hours of Respite
Mike	6
Tanisha	8
David	8
Sue	3
Juan	7
Total	32
Number of Scores = 5; Average = Total Hours (32) divided by Number of Scores (5). The average length of respite = 6.4 Hours	

Figure 5: Average Hours of Respite Care

Conclusion

There are some things which can be done to encourage the utilization of evaluation results:

- Write a good report which attends to the important issues which were raised in planning for the evaluation.
- Write a report which pays attention to the audience's needs and abilities.
- Make concrete and usable recommendations.
- Involve the program staff in all steps of the evaluation process.
- Disseminate the results in various ways and in various settings.
- Write a report which can be easily understood by those who receive it.

References

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About the Authors: David B. Langmyer, Ph.D., *is an Evaluation Consultant to ARCH. He was Chief of Evaluation and Research in the NC Division of MH/DD/SA Services for 13 years.* Gail S. Huntington, Ph.D., *is Director of Evaluation and Research for ARCH. She is a Research Investigator at the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Center at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.*

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